Friday 12 September
17h00 -18h00
Agora Room

Understanding Language Impairment

Laurie Tuller,
Imaging Brain & Neuropsychiatry iBraiN U1253,
Université de Tours, INSERM, France

Generative grammar has provided a fertile framework within which to study language impairment in children. Since its inception in the late 1950s, generative linguists have contributed to efforts to describe and explain observed differences between child language that does not appear to be developing efficiently and language that appears to be developing "typically," in a variety of contexts. We propose to examine how the fundamental tenets of generative grammar have guided research on language impairment. We suggest that this research has led to a certain number of points of consensus about the nature of language impairment in children, though a number of enduring questions remain, and, moreover, new issues have been fervently raised. Drawing notably on studies of language in autism, in DLD, in epilepsy, and in hearing loss, we illustrate how the concepts of language modularity and linguistic computational complexity, stemming from the postulate that linguistic knowledge is based on a language-specific computational system, have revealed fundamental commonalities across different contexts in which the maturation of language is disrupted. These commonalities underline the need not only for extended transdiagnostic studies, but also for large-scale "all-comer" studies, allowing for systematic study of language as a dimension that cuts across traditional nosographic categories for neurodevelopmental conditions and also that includes "normal" inter-individual variation. Taking up this challenge, and the challenges related to debunking commonly held assumptions about language impairment, entails, in particular, pursuing development of appropriate ways of observing how all children produce and comprehend language, using all-embracing methods that narrowly target linguistic knowledge.